

Sufism and Theology

Edited by
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Edinburgh University Press Ltd
22 George Square, Edinburgh

Typeset in Goudy
by Koinonia, Bury, and
printed and bound in Great Britain by
Biddles Ltd, King's Lynn, Norfolk

A CIP record for this book is available
from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 7486 2605 2 (hardback)

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EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS

Ibn Taymiyya's Commentary on the Creed of al-Ḥallāj

Yahya Michot

The great Damascene theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) is often presented as an extremist, with many dire, radical positions attached to his name. In the domain of politics, he is unjustly regarded by some as the spiritual ancestor of the kind of extremism associated with Usāma bin Lādin, the source of 'a long tradition of extreme intolerance within one stream of Islam'.¹ The situation is not much better in regard to philosophy – being the author of the *Refutation of the Logicians* (*al-Radd 'alā l-manṭiqiyyīn*), he is generally seen as an arch-enemy of the *falāsifa*.² This image of him is likewise a grave distortion. Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) was closer to the truth when he accused Ibn Taymiyya of having 'repeatedly swallowed the poison of the philosophers and of their works'.³ One ought to remember too that he not only commented on Avicenna's *Risāla Aḍḥawiyya*, on Averroes and several other Muslim thinkers, but also on the *Abridgement* (*talkhīṣ*) of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* by Thābit ibn Qurra.⁴

Quid about mysticism? Ibn Taymiyya surely wrote many fatwas and other texts condemning the deviant or suspect ideas and practices of the Sufis of his time. Nevertheless, rather than being an unconditional opponent of Sufism, he used to show great respect for the early spiritual masters of Islam,⁵ was quite probably himself a Qādirī,⁶ and composed commentaries on various Sufi texts.⁷ Th. Michel has written a study of one of these commentaries, the *sharḥ* on 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī's *Futūḥ al-ghayb*.⁸ The present chapter has to do with Ibn Taymiyya's commentary on the *Creed* ('*aqīda*) of the famous Sufi executed in Baghdād in 309/922, al-Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj. My modest hope is that it will show the theologian's relation to Sufism to be far more complex than the usual presentation of it. As, in his reading of al-Ḥallāj's '*Aqīda*, he brings in Ibn 'Arabī's ideas, the chapter should also provide a good illustration of the interaction between *kalām* and *taṣawwuf* around 700/1300.

Ibn Taymiyya speaks of al-Ḥallāj in several works.⁹ Louis Massignon in his *magnum opus*¹⁰ analysed three important fatwas. Apart from these, the most substantial text is the commentary on the '*Aqīda*, of which the French scholar does not seem to have been aware. This commentary is part of the first volume of the long *Book of Rectitude* (*Kitāb al-Istiḳāma*), which Ibn Taymiyya composed in Egypt, perhaps while in jail or under house arrest, between 705/1305 and

709/1309, probably 708/1308–709/1309.¹¹ The work sets out to deal with theology in the narrow sense of the word – the oneness of God and His attributes – and to demonstrate the complete sufficiency of the scriptural and traditional teachings on the fundamentals of the religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*). As explained by Ibn Taymiyya in his introduction, it is a ‘rule on the necessity of going straight, being balanced, following the Scripture and the *Sunna* concerning the names of God and His attributes, proclaiming His oneness in what one says and believes, and the expounding that the Scripture and the *Sunna* contain the totality of the [divine] guidance.’¹² In reality, it quickly develops into an analysis and discussion of various parts of the famous *Epistle (Risāla)* of Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), with special attention to what al-Qushayrī says about the beliefs and creeds of several Sufi shaykhs of the past, in correlation to various schools of *Kalām*. One of those Sufi shaykhs is al-Ḥallāj. Al-Qushayrī quotes his *‘Aqida* in its entirety, and Ibn Taymiyya comments on it because he considers that al-Qushayrī misinterpreted it.¹³

In order to appreciate properly what Ibn Taymiyya says of al-Ḥallāj in his commentary on his *Creed*, a double introduction is necessary. The first will briefly assess how he views the controversial shaykh in his three fatwas on him. The second will address, on the basis of the same fatwas, the question of the presence, according to him, of an incarnationist monism in al-Ḥallāj’s Sufism.

Ibn Taymiyya’s views on al-Ḥallāj in his fatwas can be set out as responsive to four main questions: (1) Was the execution justified? (2) Was he a Friend of God, i.e. a saint (*walī*)? (3) How should we understand his famous theopathic exclamation *Anā l-Ḥaqq*? (4) Did he repent?

The Mamlūk scholar knows that some people contest the legality of al-Ḥallāj’s condemnation to death:

A group [of people] have said that [in being] killed he was the victim of an injustice and that it was not permissible to kill him. They are hostile towards the Law and the jurists because they killed al-Ḥallāj. Among them, there are some who are hostile to the [whole] class of scholars and people of knowledge, and say: ‘It is they who killed al-Ḥallāj.’ These [individuals] are of the kind of those who say: ‘We have a Law (*sharī‘a*) and we have a reality (*ḥaqīqa*) that contradicts the Law.’¹⁴

Without mentioning ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī by name, Ibn Taymiyya alludes to his position on the matter but does not accept it: ‘The most serious of those who have a good opinion of [al-Ḥallāj] say that killing him was necessary in respect to the outward [rules of the religion] (*fi l-ẓāhir*), the executioner being a *jihād* fighter and the killed one a martyr. ... This is also an error.’¹⁵ As for his own view, Ibn Taymiyya states in *Fatwa I* that al-Ḥallāj was killed for heterodoxy (*ẓandaqa*).¹⁶ He was a sorcerer sometimes served by devils, experiencing satanic states and performing fallacious tricks. There is no doubt that he was an impostor and he had to be killed.¹⁷ In *Fatwa II*, the theologian’s focus is different:

Muslims only killed him for his doctrine of the indwelling (*ḥulūl*) [of the divine in humanity] and of their union (*ittiḥād*), and for similar doctrines of the adepts of heterodoxy (*ẓandaqa*) and heresy (*ilhād*); notably his words 'I am the Real' (*anā l-Ḥaqq*) and 'God in heaven and God on earth'.¹⁸

According to Ibn Taymiyya, al-Ḥallāj is not usually recognised as a *walī* by sensible people. He was, instead, possessed by the devil and there is no historical truth in the prodigious phenomena that are sometimes said to have occurred when he died.¹⁹

Among the Friends of God who know al-Ḥallāj's situation, there is none who venerates him. This is why al-Qushayrī did not mention him among the shaykhs [mentioned in] his *Epistle*, although he does mention, among other of his words, things that he finds beautiful. Shaykh Abū Ya'qūb al-Nahrajūrī had married him to his daughter but, when he discovered his heterodoxy, he took her back from him.²⁰

He was not among the Friends of God, who fear Him. Rather, some of his worship, exercises and spiritual struggles were satanic, some were psychic and some were in conformity with the *Shari'a* from some viewpoint, not from another. He was confounding the truth with vain things.²¹

For some people, it is God who was speaking through the mouth of al-Ḥallāj when he uttered his famous '*Anā l-Ḥaqq*'. According to them,

he who proclaims the [divine] oneness is He whose oneness is proclaimed. He who utters this proclamation of oneness by the tongue of the servant is the Real and nobody proclaims His oneness but Himself. He who proclaims the [divine] oneness is thus nobody else than Him whose oneness is proclaimed. They distinguish between Pharaoh's saying 'I am your highest lord' and al-Ḥallāj's sayings 'I am the Real' and 'Glory to Myself'. Pharaoh indeed said that, with himself testifying to it; he thus said it of himself. As for the people experiencing extinction (*fanā'*), they become absent to themselves and he who speaks by their tongue is someone other than them.²²

For Ibn Taymiyya, there is a very interesting debate here. For to claim, about al-Ḥallāj's *Anā l-Ḥaqq*, 'that it was God who was then speaking for ('*alā*) a human just as jinns speak by the tongue ('*alā lisān*) of an epileptic, is clear unbelief'.²³ Who, then, was the speaker? For the Mamlūk theologian, it could have been al-Ḥallāj himself, supposing that he was then affected by a psychological disorder of the type of Majnūn's absence to himself due to his excessive love for Layla. His statement would then have to be excused. The problem is, however, that al-Ḥallāj was not absent, as he wrote about his ecstasy.²⁴ The speaker in fact might then have been a demon possessing the Sufi. Ibn Taymiyya states that he has himself witnessed many similar cases of possession, adding that the situation is in no way like that of the Prophet receiving the revelation: Muḥammad was neither possessed, nor absent to himself like Majnūn; he was not speaking like Pharaoh and God was not speaking for him.

Whoever says that God spoke by the tongue ('*alā lisān*) of al-Ḥallāj, that the words that were heard from al-Ḥallāj were words of God, and that it is God who, by his tongue ('*alā lisāni-hi*), said 'I am God' (*anā Allāh*) is an unbeliever – the Muslims are agreed on that. God indeed does not indwell in humanity and does not speak by the tongue ('*alā lisān*) of a human but sends the Messengers with His words. [The Messengers] then say on His behalf ('*alay-hi*) what He ordered them to communicate and He thus says, by the tongues ('*alā alsina*) of the Messengers, what He ordered them to say.²⁵

Finally, as for 'knowing whether, when he died, al-Ḥallāj repented, between himself and God, or did not repent, this is a mystery (*ghayb*) of which God alone has the knowledge'.²⁶ Moreover, for Ibn Taymiyya, it changes nothing about the fact that he had to be put to death.

In the same *Fatwa II* in which he considers that 'Muslims only killed [al-Ḥallāj] for his doctrine of the indwelling (*ḥulūl*) [of the divine in humanity] and of their union (*ittiḥād*)', Ibn Taymiyya also writes that,

God and His Messenger have called the Nazarenes unbelievers and the Muslims are agreed on their unbelief in regard to God and His Messenger. One of the gravest things which [the Nazarenes] claim is the indwelling [of the divine in humanity] and their union by the Messiah, the son of Mary. As for those who speak of indwelling and union about someone else than the Messiah, as the exaggerators (*ghāliya*) do about 'Alī [ibn Abī Ṭālib], the Ḥallājiyya about al-Ḥallāj, the Ḥākimiyya about [the Fātimid caliph] al-Ḥākim, etc., what they say is worse than the sayings of the Nazarenes, since the Messiah, the son of Mary, is more eminent than all these. Those [people in fact] belong to the genus of the followers of the Impostor (*al-dajjāl*), who will claim to be divine so that people follow him.²⁷

The indwelling and union referred to so far or, in other terms, the 'attribution of some kind of divinity'²⁸ are 'bound' (*muqayyad*), 'particular' (*khāṣṣ*) to individuals (Jesus, 'Alī, al-Ḥallāj, al-Ḥākim ...).²⁹ In *Fatwa III*, Ibn Taymiyya turns his attention also to the 'general' ('*āmm*'), 'absolute' (*muṭlaq*) type of *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād*.

Those who report, from Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī and others, sayings relating to the particular union [of the divine and the human], the negating of their difference, and excuse them about that, say that their reason was absent, so that they said: 'I am the Real', 'Glory to me', and 'There is nobody but God in this *jubbah*'. When, they say, someone is strongly in love and his heart is weak, he becomes absent, by his beloved one to his love, by what he finds to his finding [it], and by what he remembers to his remembering, so that what was not fades away and that what has not ceased [to be] remains. Someone, it is reported, threw himself in the water and his lover threw himself [in it] after him. 'Me, I fell', he said, 'why then did you fall, you?' – 'I was absent, by you, to myself', [the lover] said, 'and I thought that you were me.'³⁰

For Ibn Taymiyya,

a state like that one, wherein someone ceases to distinguish between the Lord and the servant, as well as between what is commanded and what is prohibited, is neither

knowledge, nor reality. It is rather, at the utmost, a defectiveness of his reason by means of which one differentiates between this and that. At best then someone will excuse him rather than consider that what he says is [some] real perception of the truth.³¹

That said,

a group of the Sufis who claim to really perceive the truth consider such [states] a real perception of the truth (*taḥqīq*) and a realisation of the [divine] oneness (*tawḥīd*). It is notably what the author of *The Stopping-places of the travellers* (*Manāzil al-sā'irīn*),³² Ibn al-'Arīf,³³ and others did. [The situation is] similar to the [doctrine] of general union, which a group [of thinkers] also considered a real perception of the truth (*taḥqīq*) and a realisation of the [divine] oneness (*tawḥīd*), for example Ibn 'Arabī al-Ṭā'ī. A group [of people] were of the opinion that al-Ḥallāj was one of these [Sufis]. They subsequently formed two parties.

One party say that he fell in such a [state of] extinction. He was therefore excusable in regard to the inward aspect [of things] (*fi l-bāṭin*) but killing him was necessary in regard to the outward [rules of the religion] (*fi l-ẓāhir*). The executioner, they say, was a *jihād* fighter and the killed one a martyr. They report about one of the shaykhs³⁴ that he used to say: '[Al-Ḥallāj] stumbled. If I had been his contemporary, I would have taken his hand!' They consider his state to be of the genus of the states of the people who experience ecstasy and extinction.

A second party is [formed by] those who accept as authentic the state of the people experiencing extinction, as far as realising the oneness of Lordship is concerned, and say that it is the ultimate [accessible point]. Al-Ḥallāj, they rather say, [attained] the ultimate [degree] in real perception of the truth and realisation of oneness.³⁵

Further on in the same *Fatwa III*, Ibn Taymiyya writes, in relation to 'Abdullāh al-Anṣārī of Herāt, that people,

say that [al-Ḥallāj] was killed for having divulged the secret of the realisation of oneness (*tawḥīd*) and the real perception of the truth (*taḥqīq*), which it was not fitting for him to divulge. ... What these people really [mean by what they] say is similar to what is [meant and] said by someone saying that what the Nazarenes say about the Messiah is true, that it is also valid for others than him among the Prophets and the Friends [of God] (*walī*) but that it is not possible to state it openly.³⁶

This is a trap into which many later Sufis fell and this is why al-Junayd, may God have mercy upon him, refuted such people when he was asked about the realisation of [divine] oneness. 'It consists', he said, 'in differentiating between [what is] pre-eternal and [what is] temporally originated'. Al-Junayd, the master of the [Sufi] movement, thus made it manifest that realising the divine oneness does not obtain except by differentiating between the pre-eternal Lord and the temporally originated servant, and not as said by these people who make this be that. These people are the adepts of particular and bound (*muqayyad*) union and indwelling. As for those who speak of general, absolute, indwelling and union, they are those who say that [God] is by essence in every place, or that He is the existence of the creatures.³⁷

Those who used to speak of indwelling and union, absolute or identifiable (*mu'ayyan*),

were of the opinion that it was what al-Ḥallāj was saying and they therefore helped the latter. This is why, according to the sect of Ibn Sab'īn, among the victims of injustice there is a group of people among whom one finds al-Ḥallāj.³⁸

In this *Fatwa III*, Ibn Taymiyya thus sees al-Ḥallāj as exploited by the partisans of absolute monism and pantheism as well as by those who only speak of particular and bound forms of indwelling and union, between God and some humans. That being so, here, in contradistinction to what he does in *Fatwa II*, the theologian does not affirm that al-Ḥallāj himself was speaking of indwelling and union. So, in his opinion, did al-Ḥallāj really claim to be God, like Pharaoh and al-Dajjāl? Or was there smoke without a fire and did his disciples misbehave in regard to him as the Christians in regard to Jesus, with the consequence that it would be unjust to accuse him of the sins of his followers? At this stage of our analysis, the divergences between the views found in these fatwas do not yet allow a definitive conclusion, as the Mamlūk theologian appears to answer both questions positively. Although he generally leans towards calling al-Ḥallāj an impostor,³⁹ he could surely have been less equivocal.

Reacting to a text of some length provides a good opportunity to express oneself unambiguously. Therein lies the great interest and value of Ibn Taymiyya's commentary on the *Creed* of al-Ḥallāj.

Although Ibn Taymiyya writes once again that al-Ḥallāj 'was killed for heterodoxy (*zandaqa*)',⁴⁰ his presentation of the Sufi master is somehow less hostile in this commentary than in his three fatwas.

This is the best thing said by someone coming to his help: he was a righteous man, whose journey was authentic but who was so overwhelmed by his ecstasy (*wajd*) and [mystical] state that he slipped in his statements and did not know anymore what he was saying; now, things said by someone drunk will be kept secret and will not be reported. The killed one was a martyr, and the [person] who killed him a *jihād* fighter on the path of God. Leave aside what is said by anyone accusing him of extraordinary actions and of mixing the truth with vain things. [In fact], none of the shaykhs of the [Sufi] way – neither the first of them, nor the last of them – approves of al-Ḥallāj in everything he said. Rather, the community is agreed on the fact that he was either mistaken, or disobedient, or a pervert, or [even] an unbeliever. Someone saying that he was right in all these sayings that are reported from him is going astray or, even, will be judged an unbeliever by the consensus of the Muslims. Now, if things are so, how would it be permitted to set as a basis for the people [journeying on] the way of God, words that are only reported from him?⁴¹

In *Fatwa II*, Ibn Taymiyya calls al-Jīlānī's opinion on al-Ḥallāj an 'error'.⁴² When he quotes it in *Fatwa III*, it is after stating that his execution was Legally necessary.⁴³ Instead of doing the same in the present passage, he reproduces al-Jīlānī's comment that al-Ḥallāj was 'a righteous man'. As for the consensus of the community, which he now refers to, about the Sufi master, the least that can

be said is that it does not amount to a universal, unconditional condemnation of the latter.

The Damascene theologian's less negative appraisal of al-Ḥallāj proves even more evident when, raising the question of the authenticity of his *Creed*, he defends him against forgeries.

Are these words – and God knows better! – authentically reported from al-Ḥallāj or not? There is indeed, in the chain of those who transmitted them, someone whose circumstances I do not know about. Moreover, I have seen many things attributed to al-Ḥallāj – works, apophthegms, letters ... – and which are lies, there is no doubt about it. To be sure, in many of the sayings that are established to be from him, there are things of corrupted nature and confusion. People have nevertheless made him carry far more than his own load, since every individual wanting to bring in a new kind of mystical formula (*shāṭḥ*) and excess (*tāmma*) attributes it to al-Ḥallāj, as his [ideas constitute] a place more welcoming to such things than other [places].⁴⁴

Promising though this other Taymiyyan approach may be, the following passage of the theologian's commentary on the *Creed* of al-Ḥallāj will still come as a total surprise for the reader of his fatwas:

So, if these words of al-Ḥallāj are authentic, their true meaning consists in a disavowal (*nafy*) of the doctrine of union and indwelling into which a group of Sufis have fallen – such ideas having also been attributed to al-Ḥallāj. These words will thus be, on the part of al-Ḥallāj, a refutation of the adepts of union and indwelling; which is good, and acceptable (*ḥasan maqbūl*). As for putting forward as their exegesis (*tafsīr*) things agreeing with the views of Abū l-Qāsim [al-Qushayrī] on the [divine] attributes, this does not suit these words.⁴⁵

When, at the beginning of his *Epistle*, al-Qushayrī surveys the theological opinions of the great Sufi masters – al-Junayd, al-Shiblī, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, al-Ḥallāj and others – it is in order to demonstrate their orthodoxy, notably on questions which opposed *Kalām* schools like the Mu'tazilis and the Ash'aris: the difference between pre-eternity and temporally originated existence, the divine essence and attributes, etc. 'Know', al-Qushayrī writes,

that the shaykhs of this way built the bases of their doctrine on just foundations as far as the realisation of the divine oneness (*tawḥīd*) is concerned, and thereby protected their beliefs from innovations. They adopted for religion what they found confessed by the ancients and by the people of the *Sunna*: a realisation of the divine oneness entailing neither assimilationism (*tamthīl*) nor reductionism (*ta'ṭīl*). They knew what the reality of the Pre-eternal is and realised what the characteristic of that which exists *ex nihilo* is.⁴⁶

According to Ibn Taymiyya, in the *Creed* of al-Ḥallāj there are of course 'words that are vain and others that are equivocal, ambiguous; there are some for which no true meaning can be found and which, furthermore, are confused; and there are some whose meaning is of little interest.' That said, he acknowledges

that, in this '*Aqida*, 'there are also things that are true' (*wa-fi-hi mā huwa ḥaqq*).⁴⁷ For the Damascene theologian, however, al-Qushayrī's understanding of these things as corresponding to his own theological beliefs is wrong as they do not relate to the question of the divine attributes but to that of the indwelling of the Creator in the creatures and of their union.

One passage suffices to illustrate Ibn Taymiyya's perspective: his comment on the second sentence of the Creed: '[As for] the [being] whose appearing is by the body, the accident necessarily accompanies it.' 'These words,' Ibn Taymiyya writes,

imply the affirmation of the body, of a thing (*shay'*) that appears by the body, and of an accident that necessarily accompanies it. Now, for those whose way Abū l-Qāsim [al-Qushayrī] supports and for the rest of the *Kalām* theologians, in the creation there is nothing but bodies and accidents as the atom (*jawhar fard*) is a part of the body. These words are thus not in agreement with such a [theory]. Moreover, it could in itself be said that these [words] are a kind of mystical expression (*shayh*), not a truth. What is indeed this [being] whose appearing is by the body? If it is the body, it is not right that the latter be called 'the [being] whose appearing is by the body'. If it is something other than it – this being conceded to him – what is necessitating the evocation of that [other thing] in particular by speaking of it independently of the body although the accident necessarily accompanies the body in a more obvious way than it necessarily accompanies what is not a body? Moreover, when it is said that '*the accident necessarily accompanies it*', that is the way followed by some of the theologians of modernist (*muhdath*) *Kalām* in order to demonstrate the temporal origination of bodies by means of the fact that the accidents necessarily accompany them. In such a way, there is however a confusion that we have mentioned elsewhere; it is not the way of the shaykhs and of the knowers [of the truth] (*'arif*).

[Here is] one of the best manners to understand these words [of al-Hallāj]: the [person] who said them wanted to show the vanity of the doctrine of indwelling (*ḥulūl*), of union (*ittiḥād*), and of the godhead's appearing in humanity (*zuḥūr al-lāhūt fi l-nāsūt*): [he meant] that the Lord, glorified is He, does not indwell in any of the creatures and does not appear in any of the bodies [and] produced beings (*maṣnū'a*), as said by those who say that He appeared in the Messiah, in 'Alī, in al-Hallāj, etc. (this is what is said by those among them who are adepts of the identification (*ta'yīm*) [of the locus of indwelling]), and as said by those who say similar things about the totality of the produced beings (according to the doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī, Ibn Sab'īn and their like). [If this is so], the words [of al-Hallāj 'God] *made it necessary, for everything, to originate temporally*⁴⁸ mean that, for the [created beings], He made that a necessary concomitant, inseparable from them, so that what is temporally originated does not become pre-eternal. As for his words '*the [being] whose appearing is by the body ...*', they allude to any thing appearing by these bodies which would be deemed to be the Real and to be appearing in the bodies. The accident would necessarily accompany this [thing] appearing in the body just as it necessarily accompanies this body. The [thing] appearing in the body would then be in the situation of the body itself, and to make one of the two a Lord, a Creator, and the other a creature, would not be worthier than the reverse.⁴⁹

This text and the rest of Ibn Taymiyya's commentary on the *Creed* of al-Ḥallāj are amazing in more than one respect. This '*Aqida*' indeed offers a striking example of transcendentalism. Underlining the contingency, dependence, corporality, disunity and existential weakness of the creatures, in space as well as in time, it implicitly extols, by contrast, the greatness, the total otherness, and the uniqueness of the pre-eternal God. Thereafter it develops into an explicitly negationist theology, reducing God to an entirely immaterial and abstract reality, interpreting accordingly several Scriptural notions suggesting spatio-temporality and perceptibility by the senses or the imagination, and thus reminding one far more of Mu'tazilism than of Ḥanbalism or Ash'arism. It is the debates opposing these early *Kalām* schools that are undoubtedly the immediate background and context of al-Ḥallāj's *Creed*, and Ibn Taymiyya is most probably mistaken when he reads it as a deliberate refutation of the doctrine of indwelling and union.⁵⁰

Even more surprising than such a misreading, and more important, is the fact that Ibn Taymiyya now sees al-Ḥallāj as being opposed to *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād*, i.e. a doctrine often attributed to the latter not only by his disciples, the Ḥallājiyya, by unionists like Ibn 'Arabī, Ibn Sab'īn *et alii*, but also, sometimes, by the Mamlūk theologian himself! The contrast could therefore not be greater between such an approach and what we now read in this commentary. Following the latter, to call al-Ḥallāj a *ḥulūlī* or *ittiḥādī* should logically be nothing but defamation and calumny. He should be cleared of the associationism of the Ḥallājiyya as much as Jesus or 'Alī are innocent of the sins of those who proclaim their divinity. Later unionists cannot use him as their patron saint and he would have been an adversary of Ibn 'Arabī and his like. That has the consequence that two of the four questions raised earlier need to be asked again: Why was he put to death? And what was the real meaning of his *Anā l-Ḥaqq*?

It would indeed be absurd to claim, simultaneously, that al-Ḥallāj was opposed to the doctrine of indwelling and union and, as Ibn Taymiyya writes in *Fatwa II*, that 'Muslims only killed him for his doctrine of the indwelling (*ḥulūl*) [of the divine in humanity] and of their union (*ittiḥād*)'.⁵¹ So, the only reason for killing him would have been his *zandaqa*, an accusation which the Damascene theologian maintains in his commentary, but this heterodoxy would not be much more than a matter of sorcery, satanic states and fallacious tricks, as explained in *Fatwa I*.

As for *Anā l-Ḥaqq* and similar theopathic formulae, it would also be absurd to think that al-Ḥallāj would have meant to express by them an experience of indwelling and union, either delimited or absolute, since Ibn Taymiyya believes that he wrote his '*Aqida*' in refutation of such ideas. Such excessive ecstatic statements would then have to be explained in one of the manners mentioned in the Taymiyyan fatwas: as an imposture, as a phenomenon of satanic possession or, somewhat less negatively, as a mental disorder due to a passionate love of God.

In *Fatwa I*, Ibn Taymiyya refers to his participation in the execution of a wizard possessed by a demon in 715/1315.⁵² This fatwa is therefore posterior not only to this date but to the commentary on al-Ḥallāj's *Creed*. The absence of any allusion to indwelling and unionism in this *Fatwa I*, and the fact that the sole justification then offered for al-Ḥallāj's execution relates to sorcery, fit perfectly with this later date. As for *Fatwa II*, in which Ibn Taymiyya accuses al-Ḥallāj of *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād*, it must logically represent an earlier stage of his thought and be anterior to his commentary on the Sufi's *Creed*, i.e., probably, 708/1308–709/1309. The date of *Fatwa III* is less clear. The complexity of the passages in which Ibn Taymiyya then speaks of the charges of *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād* sometimes retained against al-Ḥallāj – without sharing them explicitly himself – seems to indicate a later date, either contemporary with or posterior to the commentary on the *Creed*.

One could elaborate on the Damascene theologian's misapprehensions in his commentary on the *Creed* of al-Ḥallāj. Far more useful here, however, is to underline that, in relation to his *Fatwa II* and *Fatwa I*, this commentary demonstrates a profound development of his thought on al-Ḥallāj, which thus proves far more complex than has generally been assumed – notably by L. Massignon.⁵³ Al-Ḥallāj is indeed now seen as opposed to the worst doctrine of *fanā'* – i.e., neither the extinction of the servant's will by his conforming to the divine religious, ethical will, nor the *fanā' al-shuhūd* by his ceasing to contemplate anything else than God, but the *fanā' al-wujūd* which consists in 'bearing witness that there is nothing existing but God, that the existence of the Creator is the existence of the created, and that there is thus no difference between the Lord and the servant – this is the extinction of the adepts of straying and heresy, who fall into the [doctrines of] indwelling and union'.⁵⁴ To oppose such doctrines of indwelling, union and extinction must surely be credited to this Sufi master whom Ibn Taymiyya otherwise often accuses of being possessed by the devil or psychologically weak in his ecstatic raptures!

That said, in relation to theological deontology, one should also give its full importance to the statement by Ibn Taymiyya that it would be 'better, more rigorous and more useful' to search for the truth by following another way than al-Ḥallāj's.⁵⁵ Just as he refuses al-Rāzī's kind of rationalism,⁵⁶ he considers that the fundamentals of the religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) cannot be defined on the basis of the ecstatic experiences of Sufis like al-Ḥallāj or others. This rigorism surely did not facilitate his relations with the Mamlūk religious establishment and was in fact already a lost cause in his time.

At the crossroads of Sufism and *Kalām*, Ibn Taymiyya's commentary on the 'Aqida of al-Ḥallāj confirms the necessity of an unpartitioned study of these dimensions of classical Islamic thought. The Shaykh al-Islām's refusal to follow al-Qushayrī's reading of this *Creed* in relation to theological debates concerning

the divine attributes, and his preference for an approach to that text as an anti-*ḥulūlī* and anti-*ittiḥādī* manifesto, demonstrate how deeply marked, and worried, he was by the spread of the theosophism of Ibn 'Arabī, Ibn Sab'īn and their like among his contemporaries. As for the real nature of the beliefs of al-Ḥallāj himself, L. Massignon writes that the *Creed* commented on by Ibn Taymiyya is 'of the same type as the later ḥanbalite *'aqida*.'⁵⁷ It does not seem, however, that the Damascene theologian would have shared this opinion since, in some parts of his commentary, he criticises al-Ḥallāj's statements for contradicting the Scriptures. For example, about the Sufi's affirmation 'No above elevates Him,' he writes: 'If, thereby, [al-Ḥallāj] meant that God is not *above* the creation, this is not true.'⁵⁸

There is an al-Ḥallāj mystery and, when repeatedly asked to position himself in regard to it, Ibn Taymiyya was eventually led to change some of his earlier views. In doing so, he has not only demonstrated that he was more open minded than some would be ready to think but – and this is just as interesting – he has invited the historian of classical Islamic thought to readdress the questions of the true nature of the Sufi master's ecstatic experience and of the influence of his theological views on later Islamic spirituality.

NOTES

1. The 9/11 Commission Report (ch. 12, 362), quoted more fully in Y. Michot, *Muslims under Non-Muslim Rule. Ibn Taymiyya on ... the status of Mardin*. Texts translated, annotated and presented in relation to six modern readings of the Mardin fatwa. Foreword by J. Piscatori (Oxford/London: Interface Publications, 2006), 126; see more generally 123–32, and Y. Michot, *Ibn Taymiyya. Mécréance et pardon* (Beirut/Paris: Albouraq, 2005).
2. On Ibn Taymiyya and *falsafa*, see Th. F. Michel (ed. and trans.), *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity. Ibn Taymiyya's Al-jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ* (Delmar: Caravan Books, 1984), 15–23.
3. Y. Michot, 'Vanités intellectuelles ... L'impasse des rationalismes selon le Rejet de la contradiction d'Ibn Taymiyya', *Oriente Moderno* 19 (2000), 597–617; 600.
4. Y. Michot, 'A Mamlūk Theologian's Commentary on Avicenna's *Risāla Adḥawiyya*. Being a Translation of a Part of the *Dar' al-Ta'āruḍ* of Ibn Taymiyya, with Introduction, Annotation, and Appendices', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14.2–3 (2003), Part I, 149–203; Part II, 309–363; *Vanités*.
5. On Ibn Taymiyya and Sufism, see, among many other references, Th. Michel, *Response*, 24–39; Th. Homerin, 'Ibn Taimīya's *Al-Ṣūfiyyah wa-al-Fuqarā'*', *Arabica* 32 (1985), 219–44; Y. Michot, *Musique et danse selon Ibn Taymiyya. Le Livre du Samā' et de la danse (Kitāb al-samā' wa-l-raḡṣ) compilé par le Shaykh Muḥammad al-Manbijī* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1991); *Ibn Taymiyya. Le haschich et l'extase* (Beirut/Paris: Albouraq, 2001).
6. See G. Makdisi, 'Ibn Taymiyya: A Ṣūfī of the Qādiriyya Order', *American Journal of Arabic Studies* 1 (1973), 118–29; republished in his *Religion, Law and Learning in Classical Islam* (London: Variorum, 1991), VII.

7. See for example Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* (hereafter referred to as MF), ed. 'A. Ibn Qāsim, 37 vols (Rabat: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 1401/1981), ii, 286–361, in which the Damascene theologian is asked his opinion on verses and statements by the shaykh Najm al-Dīn ibn Isrā'īl, Ibn 'Arabī, Rābi'a, al-Ḥallāj, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Awhād al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, al-'Afif al-Tilimsānī and the shaykh 'Alī al-Ḥarīrī.
8. See Th. Michel, 'Ibn Taymiyya's *Sharḥ* on the *Futūḥ al-Ghayb* of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī', *Hamdard Islamicus* 4.2 (1981), 3–12.
9. In addition to the texts referred to here, see also, for example, Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ*, ed. 'A. Nāṣir, 'A. al-'Askar, Ḥ. al-Ḥamdān, 7 vols (Riyādh: Dār al-'Āṣima li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1419/1999), iii, 386; *Dar' al-Ta'āruḍ*, trans. Michot, *Mamlūk Theologian* I, 200; Homerin, *Ṣūfiyah*, 233.
10. L. Massignon, *La Passion de Hallāj, martyr mystique de l'Islam*, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), ii, 52–6 (Trans. H. Mason, *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj*, 4 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), ii, 45–9). The three fatwas are edited in Ibn Taymiyya's MF: *Fatwa I* in MF, xxxv, 108–19; *Fatwa II* in MF, ii, 480–7; *Fatwa III* in MF, viii, 312–19 (the order is Massignon's). I would note in passing that Massignon's understanding of the content of these three texts is often highly questionable.
11. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Istiḳāma*, ed. M. R. Sālim, 2 vols (Riyādh: Dār al-Faḍīla li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī'; Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1420/2000), i, 115–41. On the date of *al-Istiḳāma*, see the introduction in M. Sālim's edition, 6.
12. *Istiḳāma*, i, 3.
13. Two creeds are actually attributed to al-Ḥallāj. They are translated and studied by Massignon, *Passion*, iii, 137–44 (trans. Mason, iii, 126–9). The first creed appears at the beginning of al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990), *al-Ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf* (ed. M. al-Nawāwī, Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyya, 1400/1980), 48–9. The second, which is the one commented on by Ibn Taymiyya, is preserved in al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla fi 'ilm al-taṣawwuf* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, n.d.; reprint of the Cairo edition of 1367/1957), 4; see also L. Massignon and P. Kraus, *Akhbār al-Ḥallāj* (Paris: Larose, 1936), no 13, 68–9, 31*–2*.
14. MF, viii, 314 (*Fatwa III*).
15. MF, ii, 483 (*Fatwa II*); viii, 313 (*Fatwa III*); *Istiḳāma*, i, 116. On al-Jīlānī's position, see Massignon, *Passion*, ii, 41 (trans. Mason, ii, 35).
16. MF, xxxv, 109 (*Fatwa I*): 'He stayed in gaol for a time, until the day when the miscreant nature, the heterodoxy, of what he was saying was recognised, and when he [himself] acknowledged it. He had for example mentioned this in one of his writings: when someone unable to perform the pilgrimage (*hajj*) erects a House at home, circumambulates it as [pilgrims] circumambulate the House [in Mekka], and gives alms to thirty orphans – in a manner which he was mentioning – this dispenses him from the pilgrimage.' See also MF, viii, 316 (*Fatwa III*).
17. See MF, xxxv, 108, 111, 114, 119 (*Fatwa I*).
18. MF, ii, 480. Further in the same fatwa (481), Ibn Taymiyya writes: 'In sum, there is no divergence within the community on the fact that someone who speaks of the indwelling of God in humanity and of the union of the latter with Him, and who says that man will be a god and that such [individual] is one of the gods, is an unbeliever whose blood it is permitted [to spill]. Now, this is why al-Ḥallāj was killed.'
19. See MF, xxxv, 110–11 (*Fatwa I*); ii, 482 (*Fatwa II*).

20. MF, xxxv, 111 (*Fatwa I*).
21. MF, xxxv, 108 (*Fatwa I*). See also MF, ii, 484–5 (*Fatwa II*).
22. MF, viii, 317 (*Fatwa III*). See also MF, xiv, 185; *Jawāb*, iii, 385; iv, 496–7.
23. MF, ii, 482 (*Fatwa II*).
24. 'When the [faculty of] discernment of such [a one] goes and his reason becomes absent – so that the pen, about him, is lifted – he is not to be punished for what he uttered in that state, although one knows that it is something erroneous, going astray, and that it is a [spiritually] defective state, [something] that does not happen to the Friends of God' (MF, ii, 482, *Fatwa II*). 'As for saying that [al-Ḥallāj] was only speaking about such things in ecstasy (*iṣṭilām*), this was not the case. Rather, he used to compose writings [about that] and used to say it while he was present and awake' (MF, ii, 486, *Fatwa II*).
25. MF, ii, 481 (*Fatwa II*).
26. MF, ii, 486 (*Fatwa II*); see also MF, xxxv, 110 (*Fatwa I*).
27. MF, ii, 480–1 (*Fatwa II*); see also *Jawāb*, i, 95–7; ii, 402–4.
28. MF, iii, 395: *ja'ala fi-hi naw'an min al-ilāhiyya*.
29. On the bound type of union (*ittiḥād muqayyad*), see also MF, x, 59; *Jawāb*, iv, 303–4, 497.
30. MF, viii, 313 (*Fatwa III*).
31. MF, viii, 313 (*Fatwa III*).
32. 'Abdullāh ibn Muḥammad al-Anṣārī l-Harawī (Herāt, 396/1006–481/1089), Ḥanbalī Sufi. See S. de Beaurecueil, 'al-Anṣārī', *El*².
33. Abū l-'Abbās Aḥmad, Ibn al-'Arīf, al-Ṣanhājī (481/1088 – Marrakesh, 536/1141), Sufi and ascetic esteemed by Ibn 'Arabī. See A. Faure, 'Ibn al-'Arīf', *El*².
34. 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī; see Massignon, *Passion*, ii, 375.
35. MF, viii, 313–14 (*Fatwa III*).
36. MF, viii, 316–17 (*Fatwa III*). See also *Jawāb*, iv, 497.
37. MF, viii, 318 (*Fatwa III*).
38. MF, viii, 318 (*Fatwa III*).
39. See MF, xxxv, 119 (*Fatwa I*); MF, ii, 481 (*Fatwa II*).
40. *Istiḳāma*, i, 116.
41. *Istiḳāma*, i, 116–17.
42. MF, ii, 483; see *supra*.
43. MF, viii, 313; see *supra*.
44. *Istiḳāma*, i, 119.
45. *Istiḳāma*, i, 119.
46. Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 3.
47. *Istiḳāma*, i, 121.
48. The beginning of the first sentence of al-Ḥallāj's '*Aqida*.'
49. *Istiḳāma*, i, 123–4.
50. Most astonishingly, Ibn Taymiyya is also misled in his interpretation of the end of the first part of the '*Aqida*, which he relates to God although it clearly relates to the created being. 'He who is sheltered by a place, the "where" embraces him (*man āwā-hu maḥall, adraka-hu ayn*). These words are, on the part of [al-Ḥallāj], a demonstration, by means of the incongruity of the "where" for God, of the incongruity [for Him] to be sheltered in a place. It is a null and void argumentation. The knowledge that one has of Him is indeed more manifest than the knowledge that one [might] have of

the incongruity of the “where” for Him. Now, the Sunnis, the ancients (*salaf*) of the community and its imāms, in general, do not deny the “where” from Him absolutely, because of the existence of authentic texts, coming from the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, that are categorical on this matter’ (*Istiḳāma*, i, 126).

51. MF, ii, 480; see *supra*.

52. MF, xxxv, 116.

53. See Massignon, *Passion*, ii, 52 (trans. Mason, ii, 45): ‘Ibn Taymīya (d. 728/1328), the penetrating and intolerant opponent of the monism introduced by Ibn ‘Arabī, regarded Ḥallāj as the forerunner of this heresy. He therefore persecuted his memory with particular intensity.’

54. MF, x, 222, trans. Y. Michot, ‘Textes spirituels d’Ibn Taymiyya. I: L’extinction (*fanā*)’, *Le Musulman* 11 (June–September 1990), 6–9, 29; 7.

55. *Istiḳāma*, i, 121.

56. See Michot, *Vanités*, 598.

57. Massignon, *Passion*, iii, 141 (trans. Mason, iii, 129).

58. *Istiḳāma*, i, 128. Annotated French translations of the main Taymiyyan texts concerning al-Ḥallāj are due to be published in 2008: Y. Michot, *Le sang et la foi d’al-Ḥallāj* (Beirut/Paris: Albouraq).